

SOME BIRDS COLLECTED IN LANGTANG KHOLA,
RASUA GARHI DISTRICT, CENTRAL NEPAL

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North of Katmandu lies a group of mountains on the Nepal-Tibet border called the Langtang Himal. A tributary of the Trisuli Gandak, the Langtang Khola, cuts a deep valley into this mountain system and runs in a north-easterly direction probably to the southern flank of Gosainthan. An expedition under the leadership of H. W. Tilman visited this area between June and September 1949. Botanical, and geological collections and a photo-survey of the upper part of the Langtang Khola were made (see *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* 1950, and *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society* 1950).

Between mid-August and mid-September I made a small collection of birds skins which are now deposited with the British Museum (Nat. Hist.) and which are listed below. All field records included in this list were made from notes taken between mid-August and mid-September and do not refer to observations made at other times during the expedition, except where otherwise stated.

Survey of India topo-sheet 71 H. Gosainkund. Nepal and Tibet, (scale four miles to one inch) includes Langtang Khola from its junction with Trisuli Gandak River up to an altitude of approximately 17,000 ft. A number of accessible lateral valleys and high 'kharka', or summer grazings, were also within the collecting area.

The following are the main place names:

Khangjung—a village at approximately 9,000 ft. a.s.l.

Syarpagaon—a hamlet of a few houses at approximately 9,000 ft.

Langtang—a village of 20-30 houses at approximately 11,000 ft.

Kyangjin Ghyang—a 'kharka' with a number of summer herdsman's shelters and a small 'gompa'.

Langsisa Kharka—a grazing at 14,000-15,000 ft.

Many of the birds listed were restricted, during the month of observation, to certain types of vegetation, and it would therefore be desirable to record the vegetational zones as they occurred in the Langtang Khola.

Approximate altitude:

8,000 ft. Grassy slopes with scattered *Pinus wallichianum*, *Rhododendron arboreum* and evergreen oaks; also thickets of mixed scrub, probably maintained in this state by cutting and grazing. Winter corn and maize were grown at this altitude.

9,000-11,000 ft. Fir forest, *Abies webbiana*, with bamboo under-shrub; also maples, birch and *Rhododendron barbatum*.

10,000-11,000 ft. Open scrub (5-10 ft. high) with *Berberis*, *Rhododendron*, *Rosa*, *Cotoneaster*, etc.; probably maintained in this condition by cutting.

10,000-11,500 ft. Meadows and cultivation where corn, potatoes and buckwheat were grown. The highest cultivation lies at about 12,000 ft.

11,000-13,500 ft. Birch forest, *Betula utilis* with *Sorbus microphylla* abundant and *Rhododendron campanulatum* undershrub.

11,000-13,500 ft. Mixed shrub (2-5 ft. high) of dwarf Rhododendrons, *Spiraea*, *Lonicera*, *Berberis*, *Potentilla*, etc. A number of 'kharka' lie between these altitudes.

12,000-16,000 ft. Low scrub (about 1 foot high) mainly composed of *Rhododendron anthopogon* and *Potentilla fruticosa*. The highest 'kharka' lie at the upper range of this type of plant community.

14,000-17,000 ft. Open plant communities of alpine grassland, stream sides, scree, moraines, 'ablation valleys', rock-faces, etc.

It is interesting to compare the list of birds from the Langtang Khola with that compiled by B. E. Smythies during his journey in a neighbouring region in September 1947¹. It should, however be noted that the conditions under which the two lists were compiled differed considerably. Birds also recorded by Smythies are marked* in the list below. In addition there are a number of cases where the upper altitude limit of some Langtang birds are appreciably higher than the upper limits given in the Fauna of British India. These have also been included. The numbers against each species in the list refer to species numbers in the Fauna of British India, Birds, Vol. 1-7, by Stuart Baker.

I am greatly indebted to Sir Norman Kinnear for his encouragement and help in making this collection: he has kindly supplied me with this list of identifications. I should also like to thank Mr. Sálím Ali for his help.

7. **Corvus macrorhynchus intermedius**: Himalayan Jungle Crow.

One or two pairs about Langtang village and about habitations lower down the valley.

*22. **Urocissa flavirostris flavirostris**: Yellowbilled Blue Magpie.

Occasionally seen in heavy forest, particularly among evergreen oaks and thick scrub. This bird was not seen in the birch forests or above 10,000 ft. It ranged between 8,500 and 10,000 ft. which is higher than Smythies's records.

*48. **Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax himalayanus**: Redbilled Chough.

Quite a common bird above the tree zone among rocky ground and low scrub country, from Langtang village upwards. Often about kharkas in pairs or in small parties of up to 5 or 6.

*46. **Nucifraga caryocatactes hemispila**: Himalayan Nutcracker.

Small parties up to 8 in number were occasionally seen hunting for food in the birch and fir trees, up to 13,000 ft. Baker gives up to 12,000 ft.

¹ 'Some birds of the Gandak-Kosi watershed, including the Pilgrim trail to the sacred lake of Gosainkund.' *JBNHS*, Vol. 47, 1948.

59. **Parus m. monticolus**: Greenbacked Tit.

Quite frequent among bushy country below Langtang village and around Syarpagaon. Baker says up to 10,000 ft.

64. **Parus ater aemodius**: Himalayan Cole-Tit.

Generally formed mixed parties in the birch forests, with the Rufousbellied Crested Tit and Willow Warblers, but it is less common than either of these birds. It was not seen below 11,000 ft.

*65. **Parus rubidiventris**: Rufousbellied Crested Tit.

The commonest tit in the birch forests of Langtang. It occurs between 10,500 and 13,000 ft. A very active bird.

*68. **Parus d. dichrous**: Brown Crested Tit.

Found in bushy country: a quiet and inconspicuous little bird. Collected only at Langtang village and Kyangjin Ghyang.

77. **Aegithaliscus concinnus iredalei**: Redheaded Tit.

Occasional parties of this bright little bird were seen in the shrub country between Syarpagaon and Khangjung. I did not see it in mixed parties with other Tits.

108. **Sitta himalayensis**: Whitetailed Nuthatch.

Quite a common bird in evergreen oak forests between 8,000-9,000 ft., also among *Rhododendron arboreum* scrub. Not observed above this altitude.

137. **Garrulax a. albogularis**: Whitethroated Laughing Thrush.

Two small parties seen near Khangjung in heavy scrub.

140. **Ianthocincla o. ocellata**: Whitespotted Laughing Thrush.

Three parties seen on the borders of forest in heavy bushy country at about 9,000 ft. Not seen above this altitude; they are shy retiring birds.

*161. **Trochalopteron a. affine**: Blackfaced Laughing Thrush.

162. **Trochalopteron v. variegatum**: Variegated Laughing Thrush.

These two Laughing Thrushes were the commonest and most characteristic birds about the scrub round Langtang village. They were found wherever there was adequate cover of mixed scrub or rhododendron, ranging from about 10,000-13,500 ft. Small parties would work through the bushes, flapping clumsily from clump to clump and uttering their harsh many voiced 'chatter' continuously.

*171. **Trochalopteron l. setifer**: Nepalese Streaked Laughing Thrush.

A very common bird sneaking about low scrub round Syarpagaon, and particularly about cultivated areas. Not seen above 11,000 ft. or in heavy forest. It appears to occupy an altitude range below the

two preceding species. This altitude is somewhat higher than that usually recorded. A tame but restless bird with a great repertoire of imitative sounds.

177. **Grammatoptila s. striata** : Striated Laughing Thrush.

One specimen collected at Dhunche, Trisuli River, at about 6,000 ft.

214. **Pomatorhinus r. ruficollis** : Nepal Rufousnecked Scimitar Babbler.

A very secretive bird: collected in heavy bush around Khangjung 8,000 ft.: Baker gives up to 6,000 ft. It gave its position away by a single monotonous call note.

220. **Pomatorhinus erythrogenys haringtoni** : Baker's Rustycheeked Scimitar Babbler.

Two specimens collected in heavy bush at Khangjung.

243. **Pellorneum ruficeps mandelli** : Mandelli's Spotted Babbler.

One specimen collected at Nawakot, Trisuli River, at approximately 3,000 ft.

311. **Leioptila c. capistrata** : Blackheaded Sibia.

Quite frequently seen in dense rhododendron forest, from 8,500-9,500 ft. Baker gives up to 8,000 ft. A noisy and excitable bird when disturbed.

*333. **Siva s. strigula** : Stripethroated Siva.

Occasionally seen among scrub between 9,000-10,000 ft. Baker says principally between 4,000 and 7,000 ft. Not common as observed by Smythies.

339. **Yuhina g. gularis** : Stripethroated Yuhina.

Two specimens collected, one at Langtang village and the other at Syarpagaon among dense scrub.

342. **Yuhina occipitalis** : Slatyheaded Yuhina.

Collected among mixed rhododendron scrub above the fir forest zone at about 10,000 ft.

345. **Ixulus f. flavicollis** : Yellowheaded Ixulus.

One bird collected at Syarpagaon 9,000 ft. Baker gives up to 8,000 ft.

386. **Microscelis p. psaroides** : Himalayan Black Bulbul.

Small flocks seen in bushy country around Khangjung.

405. **Molpastes l. leucogenys** : Whitecheeked Bulbul.

Quite common among bushy ground around Khangjung, 8,000 ft.: Baker says up to 7,000 ft.

***448. *Certhia familiaris mandellii* : Tree-Creeper.**

Occasionally seen in birch forest between 11,000-13,000 ft. Not seen at lower altitudes.

457. *Tichodroma muraria* : Wall-Creeper.

One bird collected from earth bank above stream near Langtang Village.

***458. *Troglodytes troglodytes nipalensis* : Nepal Wren.**

Common among large boulders partially covered with moss and among mountain 'talus' above the tree zone between 13,500 and 16,500 ft. Baker gives up to 13,000 ft. but Smythies records it at 16,000 ft. Often the only small bird to be seen on some stony wastes. Spends most of its time hunting for food under or between boulders.

471. *Pnoepyga a. albiventer* : Scalybreasted Wren.

Occasionally seen among moss-covered boulders in heavy birch forest at about 13,000 ft.

476. *Tesia c. castaneocoronata* : Chestnut-headed Wren.

One specimen collected among bamboo thicket in fir forest at 13,000 ft. Baker says as high up as 11,000 ft.

484. *Larvivora brunnea* : Indian Blue Chat.

One specimen collected at Syarpagaon.

491. *Hodgsonius ph. phoenicuroides* : Hodgson's Shortwing.

Occasionally seen in bushy ground and heavy rhododendron scrub on edge of forest. Collected between 11,000 and 13,000 ft. It was quiet and retiring in its habits.

494. *Saxicola caprata bicolor* : North Indian Stonechat.

One bird collected near Dhaibungkot, Trisuli River at about 7,000 ft.

495. *Saxicola torquata* : Collared Bushchat.

Two specimens collected : one in the Langtang valley at 14,000 ft., and the other at Dhaibungkot at 7,000 ft., in the second week of September.

***502. *Oreicola f. ferrea* : Western Dark Grey Bushchat.**

A common bird in bushy country ranging from Khangjung to Langtang village. Commonest about steep terraced hillsides at Syarpagaon.

***525. *Microcichla s. scouleri* : Little Forktail.**

Very occasionally seen where the track crosses a streamlet. Only one specimen collected between Syarpagaon and Langtang in the forest area. Not seen above fir forest.

526. **Phoenicurus frontalis** : Bluefronted Redstart.

One specimen collected near Langtang village.

532. **Phoenicurus ochruros rufiventris** : Indian Redstart.

Several specimens collected about Langtang village. Unfortunately this species was not clearly distinguished in the field, but it was probably the bird that was common among the low scrub and boulders up to about 14,500 ft.

*534. **Chaimarrhornis leucocephalus** : Whitecapped Redstart.

Quite a common bird above the tree zone; always to be found near water. Altitude range from about 10,000 to 15,000 ft., and generally to be seen in small parties of from two to five.

*535. **Rhyacornis f. fuliginosa** : Plumbeous Redstart.

Four specimens collected, including one juvenile. Occasionally seen about rocks and boulders at the edge of the Langtang River between 10,000 and 12,000 ft.

*546. **Tarsiger c. chrysaeus** : Golden Bush Robin.

Only occasionally seen above Langtang village and above Langsisa Kharka at about 14,500 ft. Smythies describes it as one of the commonest and most characteristic birds above the tree-line. It is obviously much less frequent in the Langtang valley.

549. **Ianthia cyanura rufilata** : Redflanked Bush Robin.

Frequently seen in, and about the edges of birch forest and rhododendron scrub at about 13,000 ft. Often retiring into thick scrub when disturbed but always giving its position away by a sharp throaty 'prot'.

606. **Monticola cinclorhyncha** : Blueheaded Rock Thrush.

One specimen collected on the bushy hillsides at Syarpagaon.

614. **Myiophonus caeruleus temminckii** : Himalayan Whistling Thrush.

A characteristic and common bird about the meadows at Langtang village and Langsisa Kharka. It was also quite common in the mixed oak and fir forest in heavily wooded country. Altitude range between 9,000 and 11,000 ft. in the Langtang valley. Smythies did not record this species.

628. **Prunella s. strophciata** : Rufousbreasted Accentor.

This bird is reminiscent of the European Hedge-Sparrow in behaviour and appearance. Small parties quite frequently seen feeding among the weed plants, such as docks and *Polygonum* species, around the summer grazings between 12,000 and 14,000 ft.

632. **Hemichelidon sibirica cacabata** : Sooty Flycatcher.

Two specimens collected at Syarpagaon.

636. *Siphia s. strophciata* : Orangegorgeted Flycatcher.

A locally common bird in clearings in the oak and fir forests at 10,000 ft. It was often to be seen among rhododendron bushes 'bobbing' its tail up and down to expose a white rump while at the same time it uttered a sharp churring sound.

645. *Cyornis t. tricolor* : Slaty Blue Flycatcher.

One bird collected in forest clearing at 10,000 ft.

649. *Cyornis melanoleuca* : Indian Little Pied Flycatcher.

A shy little bird which was occasionally seen among the clumps of thick bush and low scrub around Syarpagaon and Khangjung.

***Stoparola melanops styani* :** Verditer Flycatcher.

Three specimens of this beautiful bird were taken in shrub country at Syarpagaon.

699. *Chelidorhynch hypoxanthum* : Yellowbellied Flycatcher.

Two specimens collected between 12,000 and 13,000 ft.

712. *Lanius n. nigriceps* : Indian Blackheaded Shrike.

One specimen from Khangjung.

714. *Lanius schach nepalensis* : Rufousbacked Shrike.

One of the commonest birds of the Langtang valley above the forest zone from 10,000 to 14,000 ft. Baker says ascends the Himalaya up to 8,000 ft. It inhabits bushy ground, particularly willow thickets among boulders. It is a noisy conspicuous bird.

738. *Pericrocotus b. brevirostris* : Indian Shortbilled Minivet.

Small flocks of this beautiful bird were seen feeding among the tops of evergreen oak trees around Syarpagaon and Khangjung.

**Phylloscopus* spp. Willow-Warblers were perhaps the most numerous of all birds in bushy country at altitudes ranging from the lowest in the collecting area, i.e. 8,000 ft., to the highest scrub at 14,000 ft. They were particularly abundant in birch forests and clearings in this vegetational zone.

The following three species were identified from specimens:

*** *Phylloscopus reguloides*.** Crowned Willow Warbler.

Forest verge 10,000 ft.

863. *Phylloscopus maculipennis* : Greyfaced Willow-Warbler.

Collected between Langtang and Syarpagaon.

***864. *Phylloscopus p. pulcher* :** Nepal Orangebarred Willow-Warbler

Collected at Langtang village and Kyangjin.

889. *Seicercus b. burkii* : Blackbrowed Flycatcher-Warbler.

One specimen collected at 9,000 ft.

891. **Seicercus x. xanthoschistos**: Greyheaded Warbler.

Two specimens collected at Syarpagaon at 9,000 ft. Baker gives 6,000 ft. limit.

923. **Suya c. criniger**: Brown Hill Warbler.

Quite frequent among grassy slopes and cultivated terraces from about 9,000 ft. down to Rasua Garhi (6,000 ft.) in the Trisuli valley. Baker gives up to 7,000 ft.

1024. **Uroloncha striata acuticauda**: Hodgson's Munia.

One specimen collected at Dhaibungkot, Trisuli River.

1044. **Pyrhula erythrocephala**: Redheaded Bullfinch.

Quite frequently seen among the birch forests, feeding on the seeds of the birch: altitude between 12,000 and 13,000 ft. Occasionally seen in more open bushy country at these altitudes. Baker gives limit of 12,000 ft.

1052. **Propyrrhula subhimachala**: Redheaded Rosefinch.

One bird collected at 13,000 ft. Baker gives limit of 10,000 ft.

*1055. **Carpodacus t. thura**: Whitebrowed Rosefinch.

One bird killed by porter in disused hut at 13,000 ft. on the descent from the Ganga La in the Sun Kosi watershed.

*1059. **Carpodacus p. pulcherrimus**: Beautiful Rosefinch.

Two females collected at about 12,000 ft. in the Langtang valley.

1062. **Carpodacus rhodochrous**: Pinkbrowed Rosefinch.

One specimen collected at 11,000 ft.

1063. **Carpodacus rhodopeplus**: Spottedwinged Rosefinch.

One bird collected at Kyangjin.

1069. **Carpodacus erythrurus roseatus**: Indian Rosefinch.

Two specimens collected, one at Langtang village and the other at Kyangjin.

1076. **Procarduelis nepalensis**: Dark Rosefinch.

This was probably the commonest of the Rosefinches in the Langtang valley. It was collected between 10,000 and 11,000 ft.

1078. **Procarduelis rubescens**: Blanford's Rosefinch.

One specimen collected at about 9,000 ft. on the Dhukpu ridge running southwards from the Ganga La in the Sun Kosi watershed.

*1089. **Hypacanthus s. spinoides**: Himalayan Greenfinch.

A common bird often seen in small parties in open scrub and in cultivated areas from lowest locality in the collecting area to 11,000 ft.

1102. **Passer montanus malaccensis**: Tree-Sparrow.

About houses in the Trisuli valley at 6,000 ft.

1115. **Fringillauda n. nemoricola**: Hodgson's Mountain Finch.

An inconspicuous bird occasionally seen among rather open patches of scrub at Langtang village and Syarpagaon.

1139. **Melophus melanicterus**: Crested Bunting.

One specimen collected near Dhaibungkot (6,000 ft.) in the Trisuli valley.

Motacilla alba subsp.: White Wagtail.

One specimen collected at Syarpagaon. Frequent about grazings and streamlets, 11,000-14,000 ft.

1169. **Motacilla alba baicalensis**: Swinhoe's White Wagtail.

One specimen from Syarpagaon.

1174. **Motacilla cinerea caspica**: Eastern Grey Wagtail.

Two specimens collected, one at Langtang at 13,500 ft. and one at 11,500 ft. Baker says up to 12,000 ft.

1194. **Anthus striolata godlewskii**: Blyth's Pipit.

A few birds of this species were seen only during the first week of September only on 'gravelly flats' partially covered with dwarf scrub at 13,500 ft. These birds were probably on migration.

1200. **Anthus pelops**: Hodgson's Pipit.

The commonest bird in the dwarf rhododendron zone from about 10,000 ft. to the highest limit of alpine grassland. It is most abundant on grassy slopes among rough boulder-covered ground. Smythies did not record this species.

1204. **Oreocorys sylvanus**: Upland Pipit.

One specimen collected near Syarpagaon.

1266. **Aethopyga i. ignicauda**: Firetailed Yellowbacked Sunbird.

Only two pairs of this beautiful bird were seen among tall scrub at the edges of oak and fir forest at 10,000 ft. Like the next species these sunbirds were always seen feeding on the flowers of *Colquhounia*.

1274. **Aethopyga n. nepalensis**: Nepal Yellowbacked Sunbird.

Quite common on the bushy slopes around Khangjung and Syarpagaon, up to 10,000 ft.

1303. **Dicaeum i. ignipectus**: Firebreasted Flowerpecker.

Two specimens collected from the tops of evergreen oaks feeding on *Loranthus* near Syarpagaon.

1311. **Piprisoma a. agile**: Thickbilled Flowerpecker.

One collected at Dhaibungkot, Trisuli valley.

1337. **Picus s. squamatus**: Scalybellied Green Woodpecker.

Frequently seen among evergreen oak and pines about Khangjung and Syarpagaon. Baker gives up to 7,000 ft.

1370. **Dryobates auriceps**: Brownfronted Pied Woodpecker.

In similar localities to the preceding species but less frequent; also collected at Dhaibungkot. Baker gives up to 7,500 ft.

1436. **Cyanops asiatica**: Bluethroated Barbet.

One specimen collected at Dhaibungkot, Trisuli valley.

1451. **Cuculus c. canorus**: European Cuckoo.

One young bird collected at Langtang village in September. Cuckoos were occasionally heard in the oak forests during June.

*1579. **Upupa e. epops**: European Hoopoe.

Occasionally seen on grassy slopes at 8,000 ft, but one bird also seen at summer grazing at about 14,500 ft.

Cypselus sp: Swift.

Flocks of Swifts suddenly came up the Langtang valley as far as the village in the second week of August, but stayed for a few days only.

1683. **Athene b. brama**: Spotted Owlet.

One collected in dense scrub at Khangjung.

1838. **Treron curvirostra nepalensis**: Thickbilled Green Pigeon.

One collected in wooded country near Khangjung.

*1858. **Columba l. leuconota**: Snow Pigeon.

Quite common in the Langtang valley above the forest zone and up to 16,000 ft. or more. In August most of the small flocks (10 to 30) fed among the scree and boulders at high altitudes, but one flock remained throughout August by river-worn earth banks at Langtang village where they were probably nesting.

*1928. **Lophophorus impejanus**: Impeyan Pheasant or Monal.

Quite common, from 9,000 to 16,000 ft. in open broken ground or among scrub or glades in the forest. Hen birds and young about Langtang village in August, and at this time the cocks were usually in open ground at much higher altitudes up to 16,000 ft.

The following birds were also seen in the Langtang valley above the fir forest zones (11,000 ft.) but specimens were not collected.

477. **Cinclus cinclus**: Whitebreasted Asiatic Dipper.

I saw two of these birds between 11,000 and 12,000 ft. at small lateral streams coming down into the main Langtang torrent.

Streptopelia orientalis : Rufous Turtle Dove.

Pairs of birds often seen feeding on stubble at Langtang village. Field description: bluish rump; pink breast; brown streaked wings; grey on back of head and neck; no apparent collar but bluish at base of the neck.

***Delichon urbica** : House-Martin.

Small parties were commonly seen hawking insects over the meadows and streams up about 14,000 ft.

Tetraogallus sp. : Snowcock.

Two coveys of this handsome bird were seen feeding among scree blocks at 16,500 ft.

2132. Ibidorhyncha struthersii : The Ibisbill.

A small party of 10-15 occupied the gravelly river flats at Kyangjin Ghyang from June up to our departure in early September.

NOTE: A number of birds of prey were seen, including almost certainly the Golden Eagle. No ducks, geese or waders were seen in the Langtang valley. The characteristic 'croak' of a Raven was heard from some cliffs above 16,000 ft.